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ABSTRACT

Modern school research in Sweden has shown that the old selective school has been slowly transformed into an elective school, which in many ways resembles the old selective school with its parallel education systems. It is known that social background and a number of other variables (sex, nationality, type of class, etc.) have a crucial bearing on school achievement and educational choice, but less is known about the mechanisms responsible for grading. The project described in this newsletter investigated demands that teaching makes on Swedish students, how they meet these demands, and the qualifications that result. The progress of a number of students entering various programs, termed "lines," in the upper secondary schools were followed. Students in a consumer line, a workshop line, a liberal arts line, and a natural science line were selected and interviewed in fall of 1985, and these interviews were supplemented by teacher interviews and classroom and school-environment observations. Follow-up interviews were held in spring 1987 with students in the consumer line and the workshop line. (Students in the other two lines will be interviewed when they leave school in 1988.) Tentative results are reported, and subsequent research objectives are listed. (TE)

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SCHOOL RESEARCH
Newsletter

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JUNE 1987

FIELD - TOPIC
Subject-didactic research - Swedish
An upper secondary school for all

1987:5

Current Project

TITLE OF PROJECT: SWEDISH IN UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL - TWO WORLDS?

We know from modern school research that the old selective school has been slowly transformed into an elective school which in many ways resembles the old selective school with its parallel education systems.

We know that social background and a number of other variables (sex, nationality, type of class etc.) have a crucial bearing on school achievement and educational choice, but less is known concerning the mechanisms responsible for grading.

What demands does teaching make on the pupils, how do they respond to those demands and what qualifications result? These are some of the questions which are being tackled in the project Swedish in Upper Secondary School - Two Worlds?

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Background

For ten years now, sociologists Göran Arnman and Ingrid Jönsson have been following the progress of about 4,000 pupils through compulsory and upper secondary school. That study has now been completed and presented in the thesis Segregation och svensk skola, Lund 1983, and the report Olika för olika, Lund 1986. The thesis describes the pupils' compulsory school careers, the report Olika för olika describes their upper secondary schooling. The study shows that, putting it rather drastically, we have proceeded from a selective school to an elective school which in many respects resembles the old selective school with its parallel education systems.

When the pupils in the study were in grade 8, the researchers gave them the task of writing an essay about their future. They were to write about their future as they thought it would be one year after compulsory school, when they were 20 and when they were 35. I was given the task of analysing these essays, and the results are presented in the book Min framtid - Om högstadieelevers syn på framtiden, Lund 1985.

When pupils choose their future, social background has a crucial effect on their choice of 2- or 3-year line of upper secondary school. Their choice is then also influenced by sex. Compared with these factors, marks are of minor importance. Pupils are good at "grading themselves".

The reports on the Segregation Project have given us a unique corpus of material on a large number of pupils who have now left school. We know that social background and a large number of other variables (sex, nationality, type of class etc.) have a crucial bearing on both school achievement and educational choice, but less is known concerning the mechanisms involved in grading. What demands does teaching make on the pupils, how do the pupils respond to those demands and what qualifications result?

As regards the role of school as a vehicle of knowledge, skills and attitudes, Swedish occupies a central position in the educational

community. This subject conveys the fundamental cultural techniques of reading and writing, skills which influence results in practically all other subjects. What is more, this subject occurs in practically all lines and at practically all levels. This makes Swedish a natural choice for investigating the way in which teaching can help, in conflict with declared intentions, to reproduce inequality in society, and similarly, it can help to shed light on the problem as to how teaching can or ought to be able to promote equality between different social classes and between the sexes.

Supplement 80 Svenska was issued in 1982 as an alternative to previous syllabi as from the 1982-1983 school year, and it is to be introduced across the board as from the 1983-1984 school year. The new syllabus is intended to be a syllabus for all pupils and it constitutes an important stage in the work of establishing a school for all.

At the time when the new syllabus was taking effect, I interviewed Swedish teachers in various municipalities and from various schools concerning their views of the new syllabus in particular and the teaching of Swedish in general. All the teachers interviewed were taking terminal classes which included pupils from the Segregation Project. This presented opportunities of supplementing the picture of these pupils' schooling and comparing their essays from grade 8 with what "actually happened" after compulsory school.

In the autumn term of 1985, against the background already described, I began following the progress of a number of students entering various lines of upper secondary school at that time.

Strategy and purpose

I chose to follow students in a Consumer Line, a Workshop Line, a Liberal Arts Line and a Natural Science Line so as later to be able to interview a selection of pupils in each class.

The pupil interviews were supplemented by teacher interviews, classroom and school-environment observations, a number of tape-recorded lessons, theatre visits with some of the classes, and so on.

Towards the end of the spring term 1987, a new round of interviews was conducted with students in the Consumer Line and the Workshop Line. At the time of the first interview they had come straight from compulsory school and had just started their upper secondary schooling. When the second interview took place they were about to leave school and were able to view their education in retrospect.

The students in the Liberal Arts and Natural Science Lines will be leaving school in the spring term of 1988 and will be interviewed then.

Bearing in mind the results of the Segregation Project and the new upper secondary school Swedish syllabus, the points of departure for the project can be summed up as follows:

o Grading today is tending more and more to take place in upper secondary school, as a result of students being distributed between different lines and as a result of the instruction they receive in their various classes.

o Upper secondary schools are becoming increasingly obliged to educate students for intermediate-status jobs for which qualifications have increased.

o Youth unemployment is restricting educational alternatives and forcing many students against their will to stay on at school.

o There is growing competition for the more attractive educational opportunities.

o At the same time as young persons, through juvenile culture and the media, are acquiring experience denied to adults, the period for which they remain under the tutelage of the adult world is being prolonged.

However, this survey, which is based on a department of comparative literature, also has a general subject-didactic purpose:

o To investigate and compare the qualifications transmitted, through the teaching of Swedish, in 2- and 3-year lines of upper secondary school.

o To analyse the cultural concepts which students in the various lines encounter in the course of teaching and how they respond to them.

o To investigate the role of sex differences and social differences among pupils and teachers in determining the outcome of teaching.

o To elucidate the relationship between the pupils' frames of reference and their leisure use of cultural amenities.

o To study frame factors influencing the working situation and, accordingly, the teaching activities of the Swedish teacher.

The analysis is proceeding on three levels:

1. Analysis of official documents, statistics, teaching materials and professional journals.

2. Analysis of teaching. Tape-recorded lessons. Classroom observations, diaries, secondary analysis of existing empirical material from previous research projects at the Department of Comparative Literature in Lund.

3. Analysis of statements by individual students and teachers. Tape-recorded interviews.

Keywords: upper secondary schooling, Swedish teaching, cultural transmission, juvenile culture, sex and class, the cultural modernisation process.

Timescale: 1>4 years. Interim report and Ph.D. thesis.

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